



Memorandum

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Via: Gary Jackson, City Manager
Scott Shuford, Planning & Development Director

From: Stacy Merten, Director
Asheville/Buncombe Historic Resources Commission

Subject: Historic Preservation Program and Green Building/Affordability

Date: February 14, 2007

In response to questions and concerns that have developed concerning the Historic Preservation program in Asheville, I have compiled the following information for the Planning and Economic Development Committee. This information includes some background information about historic preservation as well as specific discussion of the green building and affordability issues. I will be at your meeting of February 14 to go over this information with you and receive your direction.

Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation

In addition to the promoting the psychological benefits associated with the continuity and quality of life, Asheville like many other cities across the country has found preservation to be a useful tool for stabilizing property values and stimulating new investment in older residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. Preservation efforts have also increased tourism, especially heritage tourism which is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry. Asheville was recently designated as a Preserve America Community in recognition of its continuing commitment to preservation. Preserve America is a Presidential initiative designed to provide funding for preservation and to increase tourism and economic development.

During the past twenty five years, Asheville has seen the renaissance of the downtown area, due in part to the recognition and designation of downtown as a national historic district. Between 1976 and 2003, Buncombe County investors took advantage of Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits with 135 tax credit projects for a total of \$71,214,814.00, which was far greater than any other county in the state. The majority of these projects were located in the Downtown Asheville National Register Historic District. The Montford community, one of Asheville' oldest neighborhoods, which is both a local and national district, has also experienced a revitalization since the inception of the historic preservation program.

I have attached a report prepared by Dr. Pamela Nickless, a former HRC member and Professor of Economics at UNCA, which outlines the basic economic benefits of historic preservation and provides greater detail of the economic picture.

Historic Resources Commission – Submittal Requirements and Timelines

Currently the Historic Resources Commission (HRC) is comprised of 14 members; 7 appointed by the City of Asheville and 7 appointed by Buncombe County. The HRC meets on the second Wednesday of each month. The application deadline is three weeks prior to the meeting and is posted on the website. Application fees are \$50.00 for residential and \$75.00 for commercial applications. Provided that applications are submitted with the project description by the deadline, so that the staff can meet the legal deadlines for advertising, the staff is extremely flexible in working with applicants to allow supporting materials and design changes to be submitted after the application is filed. The policy for new construction is to first have a preliminary review, prior to final review. We encourage all applicants to meet with the HRC staff as early as possible for assistance with preparation of the submittal package, scheduling their project and designing a project to meet the guidelines.

I have attached a sample application and submittal checklist for your information.

Historic Preservation and Green Building

There has long been an active dialogue between the historic preservation and green building movements on how to simultaneously apply each other's standards to historic buildings. With both camps sharing the ideologies of conservation, preservation, and the reuse of existing resources, it seems logical that both groups would work together to establish common standards for the greening of historic properties.

In October 2006, the first National Summit met to formalize the discussion between the historic preservation and green building groups. Seventy experts from a wide range of professions, including architects, contractors, academics, environmentalists, government officials, consultants, and other professionals, made the attached findings and recommendations. These were presented at the United States Green Building Council's annual conference in Denver, Colorado in November 2006 and will also be presented at the American Institute of Architects conference in May 2007. This will ensure that the "Greening of Historic Properties National Summit" has a national impact and will encourage the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the United States Green Building Council and other organizations such as the Association for Preservation Technology International, the AIA, and the National Parks Service to endorse standards for the greening of historic properties.

Here is a link to the working paper on this Summit:

<http://www.clevelandrestoration.org/Sustainability/PHLF%20Final%20WP%20document.pdf>

Clearly, there is common ground between the two movements, while there are also challenges to overcome. But most importantly there is ongoing dialogue at the highest levels and an effort being made to reconcile between the two movements. At the local level, the two most pressing concerns that consistently emerge with existing structures are replacement windows and skylights.

With regard to historic windows, which are major character-defining features, our local guidelines have been developed in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standards. These guidelines do not allow replacement unless windows are deteriorated beyond repair. Contrary to some interpretations, meeting LEED guidelines does not require replacing historic windows. Historic windows can be reused in an energy efficient manner. A traditional single-glazed, double hung window has an R-value of 1, compared to an R-value of 3 for a new double-glazed, low-e, double hung window. If the historic wall assembly has an R-value in the teens, taking a window from R1 to R3 will not provide sufficient energy savings to offset the cost of replacement windows and associated waste. The primary cause of cold infiltration can be addressed with jamb insulation, weather stripping, and trim repair. For an extra layer between the occupant and the elements, a storm window can be mounted to the existing window—interior or exterior—with little change to

the character of the original unit. Many historic buildings featured hinged, wood storm windows that can be reused. Historic windows were constructed of dense, old growth wood. The life cycle of modern replacement windows is much shorter; longevity therefore becomes an important factor to consider – an historic window may outlast multiple modern replacements, with production energy and construction waste creation outweighing the relatively-small added energy costs of the historic window.

Skylights and, more recently, solar panels have surfaced as an issue in the historic districts. With this issue, it is harder to reconcile the needs of green building with historic preservation as the guidelines do not allow contemporary technologies such as these to be placed where they are visible from the street. There is opportunity, however, especially with new construction, to design in such a way that this type of technology can be incorporated. Additionally, in many cases, placement of skylights and solar panels can be achieved by placing them on parts of the structure not visible from the street.

I have attached an article from the WNC Green Building Directory highlighting an award winning green Asheville house that was built in Montford by Rob Moody of the Eco-builders who is also a member of the HRC. The bottom line is that green building can be achieved in a local historic district.

Historic Preservation and Affordability

While there is little doubt that new construction in historic districts can be more expensive (historic district construction costs are estimated by local contractors at roughly 25% higher than in areas not subject to historic preservation requirements), increasingly across the country, the rehabilitation of historic structures for affordable housing projects utilizing the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit is on the rise. However, if the only or primary goal is to provide affordable housing, it is certainly less expensive to develop on properties not subject to historic design guidelines. Staff feels it is important to strike a balance regarding affordability, sustainability and community revitalization. Most historic areas are closer to work, schools and public transit, which can help to offset some of the increased costs. Additionally many rehabilitation projects are more suitable to mixed income housing which is often seen as a goal to better integrate affordable units into the community. It should also be noted that many affordable units have been developed in Montford over the years, including modular units. Also there is a great potential for accessory apartments, a historically-common use which can be integrated into the neighborhood as a form of affordable housing.

Ultimately historic preservation should not be viewed as antithetical to affordable housing, but each new district should be reviewed on a case by case basis with regard to affordability among a number of other factors.